

School Trip Abroad

Background

Students learn in a number of ways; school field trips are useful tools that allow young people to develop hands-on experience and learn outside of a traditional classroom setting. They can also ignite a student's passion for learning that they may not have had the inspiration for in the classroom. However, school trips provide unique exposures that may not be as commonly experienced in the classroom and, thus, additional planning may be required.

Scenario

- On the last night of a school trip abroad, students were attending a dance that the program had arranged for them. The event was held at an outdoor facility on the campus of the University where the students were lodging.
- The dance was attended by all 23 students and 3 chaperones. During the event, claimant was dancing barefoot on the dance floor with a chaperone located "approximately 10 feet away."
- Claimant stepped on a shard of glass. Investigation was unable to determine how the glass got on the dance floor or for how long the glass was there.
- The chaperone who observed the incident instructed two nearby students to grab paper towels from the bathroom and to notify the lead teacher. One student returned within a minute with paper towels from the bathroom; the lead teacher arrived about 4 minutes later.
- After approximately 25 minutes, the lead teacher determined that the student should be brought to the infirmary at the University. Claimant, the lead teacher, and another student arrived at the infirmary approximately 35 minutes after the incident.
- The nurse on staff at the infirmary cleaned the wound and applied 2 butterfly band aids to the laceration. Claimant was released from the infirmary that night; however, **claimant's parents were not notified of the incident.**
- Claimant woke up in extreme pain in the middle of the night, when it was identified that the wound had reopened. The lead teacher was notified, who then escorted the claimant to the nearby hospital.
- At the hospital, it was determined that the laceration required 14 stitches. Claimant was discharged early that morning; however, **claimant's parents were not notified of the incident.**
- During the flight home later that day, the student continuously complained about significant pain and discomfort in her foot and shin area. There was swelling and noticeable bruising in this area.
- Upon landing, EMS was notified and responded. EMS recommended transporting claimant to the local hospital.
- The Emergency Room doctor found that the student had developed a blood clot that was lodged in a main vein in her lower leg.
- School administration notified the claimant's parents of what was happening approximately 2 hours after the claimant was admitted into the emergency room.

Liability Assessment

Total expenses for the incident, which included multiple hospital visits, medical procedures and treatments, equaled \$17,375. In addition to the direct costs associated with this claim, the claimant's parents also alleged that the school violated its responsibility of attempting to notify the parents of the incident. The parents ultimately decided not to file a notice of intent to sue against the district. Instead, the parents made the decision to enroll their child in a private school within town for the remainder of the student's high school career.

Lessons Learned

- **Emergency Action Plan:** Develop an Emergency Action Plan that addresses what to do in emergency situations, resources available during the trip (such as local hospitals/infirmarys), best practice of transporting students during emergency situations, process for notifying parents/guardians, etc.
- **Chaperone Program:** Develop a training protocol that chaperones would be required to take before going on a school trip. This training can include the rules of the trip and the Emergency Action Plan.

Ensure that the chaperone-to-student ratio is sufficient for the trip. Schools should keep in mind that this ratio may change if a chaperone must escort a student/students away from the group in an emergency situation.

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- Notification: Notify the student's emergency contact, as indicated in the child's Emergency Information Card, as soon as possible following a medical event or emergency situation. Inform parents / guardians of this process beforehand and ensure that chaperones understand these expectations.

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Visit our training schedule at CIRMA.org for a list of current training programs.